

An evaluation of different kinds of spirituality

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Abstract

Are all kinds of spiritualities equal? Spirituality has become an important concept in our society. However, it seems that there is a lack of clear definition and various different spiritualities exist. This article explores these different spiritualities and their backgrounds and considers the question whether all should be considered equally valid. Three criteria to evaluate different spiritualities are developed and applied to these different kinds of spiritualities. It appears that many of these different spiritualities and the application thereof in daily life is rooted in a post-modern understanding of the world. This is, however, not without problems as will be shown.

Opsomming

Is alle soorte spiritualiteite gelyk? Spiritualiteit het 'n belangrike konsep in ons samelewing geword. Dit blyk wel dat daar 'n tekort aan duidelike definisies is en behalwe vir hierdie tekortkoming bestaan daar ook verskeie spiritualiteite. Hierdie artikel verken die verskillende spiritualiteite asook hulle agtergronde en ondersoek die vraag of hulle almal as ewe geldig beskou kan word. Drie kriteria is ontwikkel en toegepas op die verskillende spiritualiteite om hulle te evalueer. Dit blyk dat baie van hierdie spiritualiteite asook hulle toepassing in die daaglikse lewe binne 'n post-modernistiese

wêreldbeskouing gegrond is, wat soos gewys sal word, nie sonder probleme is nie.

1. Orientation

Spirituality has become a new buzzword in today's society. In all contexts of our postmodern culture we are confronted with this concept. Within a Western context spirituality has usually been connected with the Christian religion, however this is not the case anymore. Anybody can be spiritual in any possible religion or a religious way, it seems. Religions and different systems of thought have claimed to place value on spirituality (Crompton, 1998:33f; Houtman & Aupers, 2007:304; Heelas, 2012:4ff). For example Eastern spiritualities have heavily infiltrated the West (Ellwood, 1987). In contrast to the modern view, atheists and/or secular humanists now value the concept of spirituality and claim to have spiritual needs (Burnard, 1988:130; Crompton, 1998:43; Wright, 2000:79; Ratcliff & Nye, 2006:475). Such a conception is completely divorced from its historical precedents, and has taken on new meaning, which was not present in the earlier usage for most of Western history.

In general spirituality seems nowadays to be seen as being inherent in human beings (Wright, 2000:39; Scott, 2005:119; Gellel, 2007:2; Hodder, 2007:185ff), thus being a human universal (Hay, Reich & Utsch, 2006:50). Sometimes this is seen as having biological or evolutionary roots (Wright, 2000:39; Hay, 2001:106; Scarlett, 2006:28; Hay *et al.*, 2006:50). This then means that spirituality is genetically endowed and functions causally as an antecedent to religious and ethical beliefs (Hay *et al.*, 2006:51). The most common characteristic of today's conceptions of spirituality is that they are inclusive and relativistic, even though this view does not seem to be shared by all authors (King, 1996:343; Chater, 2001:64).

This move away from a Christian origin and understanding of spirituality and the new inclusive applications of spirituality in different contexts, therefore should be considered and examined. This article attempts to shed light on the different spiritualities and the frameworks in which they are grounded. It will then be attempted to provide a framework for evaluating these vastly different forms of spirituality.

In this investigation selected religions will therefore be considered, namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, the traditional African religions and Christianity. Even though there are other religions which could be investigated these were chosen as they are the ones which have the most presence in the South African context (Anon, 2010). Although there are few Buddhists in South Africa, probably around 0.1% (Nation Master, 2009), Buddhism still does exert an influence in the form of religious ideas that have infiltrated Western thought through spiritual practices such as yoga and the like.

Each religion will be briefly described regarding origin, writings, practices and then lastly spirituality. A religion has to be understood, at least in a rudimentary way before its spirituality can be comprehended. After considering these different religions various contemporary conceptions of spirituality will also be presented. Eventually an evaluation according to certain criteria will be attempted.

2. Spiritualities in different religions

2.1 Any deity is welcome, just don't be exclusive ... – Hinduism

Hinduism is claimed to be the oldest religion of the world (De Beer, 1996:27; Getis, Getis & Fellmann, 2000; Hanna & Green, 2004). It is very different to the monotheistic traditions of the West. It has no founder and no definite beginning (Krüger, Lubbe & Steyn, 2004:59). It is claimed to have developed among a people called Aryans who moved into India round about 1500 B.C. Hinduism grew out of an observation of nature and life and was influenced by the existing tribal religions of the people living in India. Many of these people's ideas and practices were later on included into Hinduism (Thundy, 1985:77f; De Beer, 1996:28ff; Klostermaier, 2005:1ff). Hinduism can absorb a wide variety of new beliefs at any time as long as there is no claim to exclusiveness (De Beer, 1996:27; Getis *et al.*, 2000:267) which probably makes Hinduism the most inclusive religion of all.

In general Hinduism can be described as being pantheistic. It consists of a broad category of religious beliefs (De Beer, 1996:27; Geisler, 1999:316; Tennent, 2002:37). Hindus do not have any authoritative doctrine, nor an accepted canon. There is rather a

great variety of amorphous writings, which were compiled over many centuries (Eidlitz, 1957; Bass, 2004; Krüger *et al.*, 2004:60ff; Klostermaier, 2005).

The probably oldest Hindu writings are the so-called Vedas which were compiled around 1500 and 800 B.C., possibly written down by Brahmin priests after a long oral tradition (De Beer, 1996:31; Bass, 2004). These texts as well as their commentaries such as the Brahmanas and the Upanishads are considered to be 'inspired' (Eidlitz, 1957:11). They, however, do not have the status of scripture as the Bible has for the Christian. The Vedas are seen as having always existed. They are thus not grounded in verifiable history. The authors and the time of writing are unknown (Geisler, 1999:316). Contradictions are not seen as problems as the Vedas are considered to consist of 'holy' utterances (Eidlitz, 1957; Bass, 2004).

Another very important text is the Bhagavadgita. The main doctrine here is that true happiness is only found through acting without involvement. Furthermore the Bhagavadgita also contains instructions on the practice of three kinds of yoga (De Beer, 1996:33; Eidlitz, 1957:186). There are, however, many more texts of such volume that it is impossible to discuss them all. In general it can be said that the texts contain nearly every genre of literature such as philosophical treatises, folk medicine, erotic poetry, grammar tomes, devotional hymns, liturgical manuals and ethical instructions. There is a considerable amount of morally questionable material within Vedic literature, which range from racial prejudices, rigid social hierarchies to prostitution, rape and murder (Bass, 2004). Prostitutes and thieves even had their own gurus (Eidlitz, 1957:80f).

Although no generally accepted doctrine exists, there are nevertheless a few conceptions which are fairly general to Hinduism which will briefly be mentioned.

- *Atman and Brahman*: Atman deals with self-knowledge, though not in a psychological sense but much rather in a metaphysical sense. The claim is that if you know yourself you know everything, which is Brahman (the ultimate reality), however, at the same time Brahman is also nothing. This knowledge is, however, almost unattainable (Klostermaier, 2005:89f; Eidlitz, 1957; Krüger *et al.*, 2004:73f).

- *Karma, samsara* and *moksha*: Hindus believe in *karma*, meaning that every act in this life will have an effect still in this life, as well as on the nature of the next life. The release from this cycle is *moksha*, meaning that existence will ‘fuse’ with Brahman. As long as this has not happened the soul upon death is reborn into another being (*samsara*) (De Beer, 1996:42f; Tennent, 2002:74ff; Krüger *et al.*, 2004:75f; Klostermaier, 2005:89f; Waaijman, 2002:874f).
- *Maya*: This refers to a common belief that visible reality is in fact an illusion. It comes from the idea that when a person comes into existence that it forgets its essential identification and oneness with Brahman. The solution thus lies in realising and achieving perfect oneness with Brahman (De Beer, 1996:42; Krüger *et al.*, 2004:78f).
- The “one and the many” embodies the classic tension in Hindu theology. According to Tennent (2002:37ff) Hindu philosophy has always taught that one ultimate reality exists, and yet in opposition to that Hindus worship literally millions of different gods.

Considering Hindu spirituality proves to be quite difficult as the term is often not used in the literature. However, a project in Hinduism which seems to be quite general is the idea that people should transcend the world of illusion to discover the true Self, in other words to achieve *Atman* and *Brahman* as described above or to obtain spiritual release or liberation which is an identification with the all-pervading God (Geisler, 1999:317; Krüger *et al.*, 2004:75,81). *Bhakti* (devotion) is the spiritual road to complete dedication to Brahman (Waaijman, 2002:347). The other doctrines mentioned above play an important role here as well. According to Krüger *et al.*, (2004:80f) this striving is usually linked to ethics, in that morality and spirituality are seen as being mutually dependent.

The striving towards oneness and liberation seems to be an intrinsic endeavour of Hindu spirituality. There are nevertheless more extrinsic forms of spirituality. Due to the immense variety of Hindu religious practice it is, however, impossible to describe the typical practical spirituality. Typical practice does not exist (De Beer, 1996:47). Hindus usually worship many different gods, depending on area and type of Hinduism, which involves festivals, as well as performing rituals in the home where usually a shrine plays a role (Krüger *et al.*, 2004:83ff; De Beer, 1996:46ff).

Looking at Hinduism as a whole and making a few comparative remarks it becomes obvious that Hinduism is probably only unified in its assertion that all is ultimately one, and that there should never be contradictions. It seems that this religion and its spirituality can be described as inclusive, meaning that it is open to a vast array of interpretations and experiences and is very hesitant to accept any contradictions and limitations. However, in this context Ramachandra (1996:17), who criticises the concept of inclusiveness in religions will be quoted: “A religion that a priori refuses to recognise fundamental disagreements can hardly be called tolerant, for it simply refuses to respect the ‘otherness’ of the other.”

2.2 Emptiness as the highest aim – Buddhism

Buddhism, in contrast to Hinduism, has a founder and thus has a date when Buddhism ‘started’. Buddhism arose during a time when spiritual culture in India was at a low ebb (Prabhavananda, 1981:168).

Siddharta Gautama (c563-483) was, it is claimed, born into a wealthy and powerful family, where he was shielded from the harsh realities of life. The story is told that one day, however, he came into contact with human suffering, he saw old age, disease and death. This had such a strong influence on him that he renounced his extravagant lifestyle and went into seclusion in order to find answers to the problem of human suffering (Prabhavananda, 1981:169ff; Krüger, 1996:67ff; Tennent, 2002:90; Krüger *et al.* 2004:99ff). He then claimed to have achieved illumination one day while sitting under a tree after having been attacked by the ‘Evil One’. Here he gained insight into all previous lives as well as into the origin and disappearance of all things (Krüger, 1996:68f). He claimed that he had basically discovered how to break the cycle of birth, suffering, death and rebirth (Tennent, 2002:90). This is also where he got his name Buddha, which means “enlightened one” (Hanna & Green, 2004). From there he started proclaiming his newfound wisdom. It is important to realise that the Buddha’s aim was not to start a new religion. His life and efforts should rather be seen as an intended reform movement within Hinduism, which in the end did result in a new religion (Prabhavananda, 1981:171; Getis *et al.*, 2000:268).

The Buddha’s teaching can be summarised as follows: Due to *karma* all of life is trapped in the endless circle of birth and rebirth out of which four noble truths emerge:

- Life is suffering.
- Suffering is caused by craving and desires or attachment.
- The solution is to cease desiring and break attachment.
- The way to achieve this is through the eightfold path, which consists of right understanding, right intention, right speaking, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right attention, right concentration (Krüger, 1996:73f; Grow, 1996; Tennent, 2002:91f; Krüger *et al.*, 2004:109ff).

The aim then of life is to achieve *nirvana* (nothingness), to break free from this cycle of births and rebirths (Geisler, 1999:788).

An important doctrine in Buddhism is the notion of a circular causality (*pratitya-samutpada*). It entails that everything has a cause and is conditional, and at the same time that no final cause exists. The idea here is that everything in the world arises because it is linked to something else (like spokes in a wheel) (Tennent, 2002:91). A second important and related doctrine is that of *anatman* (no-soul) which denies the existence of a soul and an ultimate reality (Brahman). This is one of the areas of disagreement between Hinduism and Buddhism (Morris, 2001:236; Tennent, 2002:91f).

It is now necessary to look at further developments in Buddhism after the Buddha's death. There are two major movements namely *Theravada* Buddhism and *Mahayana* Buddhism, which will not be discussed here due to lack of space.

The most important development in the context of this article is Zen-Buddhism, as it has spread widely also in Western countries. Zen-Buddhism developed out of a synthesis between Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism (Prabhavananda, 1981:193f; Ellwood, 1987:114ff). The word *Zen* refers to meditation, and explains that this type of Buddhism places a great value on meditation (Krüger *et al.*, 2004:125). Zen in general is rather difficult to understand as it claims to be no system, philosophy or religion. Its central doctrine has been described as at the same time being everything and nothing. Man is god and god is man. Everything is illusionary and the aim is to achieve *nirvana* (Geisler, 1999:790f; McDowell, 1999:644ff). It has been described as deliberately denying logic and the dualism of object and subject (Geisler, 1999:788). At the same time adherents of Zen-Buddhism claim that Zen-Buddhism may

only be understood in a non-dualistic way. Such reasoning, however, makes implicit use of dualistic thinking, by implying that a dualistic view exists. This seems to show that a dualism of subject and object appears to be inherent in reality, and that it is as a result inescapable.

There are several commonalities between Buddhism and Hinduism, both are inclusive, and both focus on inner states of the mind. Buddhist spirituality, basically trying to emerge into nothingness, to move into a transcendent way of being. It is not focused on a deity, but rather on the absence thereof (Geisler, 1999:788ff).

2.3 Submission as a lifestyle – Islam

In contrast to the other Eastern religions Islam is a monotheistic religion (Tennent, 2002). The word “Islam” is of Arabic origin and means “to submit” or “to surrender” to the will of God (Fellmann, Getis & Getis, 1997:166; Krüger *et al.*, 2004:221).

Islam has a very definite beginning in what is today Saudi Arabia. It originated in the early seventh century with the prophet Muhammad. During that time the Arabs worshipped many gods and their whole moral system was very corrupt. Muhammad, seeing this became very dissatisfied and began to retreat increasingly into the mountains where he would meditate and pray (Naudé, 1996:151). It is there that he claims the angel Gabriel appeared to him, giving him revelations which he memorised as he could not read or write himself (Ankerberg & Weldon, 2005:35). After a time of doubt he came to believe that God had intended him to be the messenger to the Arab people, to bring them the message which the Jews and the Christians had already received (Naudé, 1996:150ff; Fellmann *et al.*, 1997:166; Tennent, 2002:143; Krüger *et al.*, 2004:223ff).

Muhammad then proclaimed his message, in the beginning only reaching few people and having to endure much opposition. This caused him, after the death of his wife and uncle, to move to Medina, where his message spread and became popular (Naudé, 1996:157; Krüger *et al.*, 2004:225). Two years before his death he returned to Mecca which soon converted to this new religion (Goucher, Leguin & Walton, 1998:200). After Muhammad’s death different caliphs succeeded him and it was especially under the second caliph (Umar), that Islam expanded very quickly. Eventually

several dynasties followed of which the Abbasid dynasty became very significant. It was characterised by a glorious phase of development in the arts, literature, science, philosophy and especially architecture (Krüger *et al.*, 2004:225). After the collapse of the Greco-Roman world it was especially the Arabs who preserved Hellenistic culture, communicating it to Europe through Spain (Naudé, 1996:157). From the 15th century Islam started to decline and stopped spreading further. Today, however, due to demographic factors Islam is the second largest religion, as well as the fastest growing religion.

Islam claims to have historical beginnings and has scriptures which are accepted as authoritative by most Muslims. Even though Muhammad is the founder of Islam, Muslims trace their history back to Abraham, who was the father of Ishmael. Islam accepts many of the Biblical figures such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, David and Jesus (Fellmann *et al.*, 1997:166; Krüger *et al.*, 2004:233). However, Jesus is only seen as a prophet and never as the son of God, as the idea of God having a son, who is then also crucified, is blasphemous to Muslims (Naudé, 1996:175; Tennent, 2002:169ff). They claim that Muhammad received God's final message, given through the angel Gabriel (Naudé, 1996:163), a message which had not remained pure in Christianity and Judaism (Tennent, 2002:147).

The Quran is the most important book in Islam. It consists of the revelations Muhammad had at various stages of his life, and which was written down 25 years after his death (Tennent, 2002:144). The Shariah, which is derived from the Quran as well as the sayings of the prophet regulate every aspect of Muslim life (Krüger *et al.*, 2004:242f).

In Islam there is no distinction between the sacred and the secular, as the whole life should be lived as a service to God (Naudé, 1996:171). In this Islam is similar to the African religions, who also integrate religion into all of life. Islam, however, has very specific rules. It is characterised firstly by the 5 duties, which are also called the five pillars of Islam, which everyone has to adhere to:

- Testimony (*Shahada*): Muslims have to recite "There is no god beside God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God". Upon repeating this statement a person becomes a Muslim.

- Ritual prayers (*Salat*): Five times a day a Muslim has to pray specific prayers, facing in the direction of Mecca. These prayers should be observed in a mosque but can also be recited at any other place. These prayers are intended to honour God.
- Almsgiving (*Zakat*): The zakat is an obligatory levy on property, which every Muslim is supposed to pay. Further free-will offerings are encouraged.
- Fast (*Saum*): This occurs during the month of Ramadan. No food or drink may be consumed, nor any sexual activity be engaged in between daybreak to nightfall. This is an opportunity for Muslims to detach themselves from earthly anxiety.
- Pilgrimage (*Hajj*): At least once in his lifetime a Muslim should go on a pilgrimage to Mecca, where he has to walk around the Kabah seven times and kiss the Black stone. A sacrifice is also made in remembrance of Abraham's intended sacrifice of his son. The pilgrimage creates a strong bond of solidarity between believers (Naudé, 1996:171; Krüger *et al.*, 2004:239; Ankerberg & Weldon, 2005:34).

Even though there is hardly any mention of Islam spirituality as such in the literature, some conclusions regarding this matter can nevertheless be drawn. Islam is a religion firstly of total surrender to God (Waaijman, 2002:347) and secondly of rules and belief in a God who is not directly involved in the matters of people and religion can therefore be described as being extrinsic. Allah is clearly not a god of love as revealed in the Judeo-Christian tradition (Ankerberg & Weldon, 2005:37). There is nonetheless a group in Islam, known as Sufis, who practice meditation and who have similar elements in their religious practice as VedanticHinduists (Tennent, 2002:151,187). The great majority of Muslims are, however, Sunni (about 86%) and Shi'ites. The division between the two occurred as a result of a power struggle. They also have some differences in theology concerning the attributes of Allah, as well as the view of eschatology (Goucher *et al.*, 1998:203f; Tennent, 2002:149), however, what remains the same in these two groups are the five pillars of Islam, which emphasise extrinsic practices.

2.4 Appeasing the ancestors – African religion

“Africans are notoriously religious”. This quote by Mbiti (1990:1) summarises African traditional religion as a holistic view of life,

where daily life and religion are intimately related. Religion or spirituality therefore pervade the African worldview, and Africans are influenced by their spirituality in all areas of life, including politics and economics (Van Binsbergen, s.a.).

African religion here exclusively refers to traditional religion. It does not refer to forms of Christianity or Islam which are also found abundantly in Africa.

In contrast to other religions, African traditional religion does not have a founder and has no sacred writings (Mbiti, 1996:16f; Krüger *et al.*, 2004:36). Also African religion does not have a specific name, its name simply refers to geographical location.

There is no one uniform African religion. Different tribes have different rituals, practices and beliefs. There is a discernable common framework, and different tribes have varying spiritual complexes which together make up the total of their religious or spiritual life (Van Binsbergen, s.a.; Mbiti, 1996:3; Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005:215; Tennent, 2007:122).

Maybe the most important feature of African religion is that life is seen as holistic and according to Mbiti (1990) every facet of life is permeated by religion, a claim which is supported by other authors (Nyamiti, s.a.:1; Krüger *et al.*, 2004:35; Friedenthal & Kavanaugh, 2007:18f;). Divinity is believed to be present in all aspects of the universe (Potgieter, 2002:88). This will be explained in more detail in the following paragraphs. In general African religions consists of five aspects:

- Belief in God;
- Belief in divinities;
- Belief in spirits;
- Belief in ancestors;
- The practice of magic and medicine (Oladipo, 2004:356).

African religions are referred to as animistic or superstitious or only focused on ancestor worship. Often authors describe African religions as being primitive and inferior (Mbiti, 1996:18f; Crafford, 1996:5ff; Oladipo, 2004:355).

According to African tradition God created the world and is still involved in it, however, indirectly through spirits (Oladipo, 2004:357; Friedenthal & Kavanaugh, 2007:20). In the eyes of many Africans

God is mainly good, almighty, omniscient, and omnipresent. He is still involved in the happenings on earth. He is not a personal God (Nyamiti, s.a.:5; Oladipo, 2004:357). Nonetheless there are other views according to which God is far less involved or even hidden (deusotiosus) (Tennent, 2007:122). He is also not believed to be loving or holy (morally good) (Crafford, 1996:13). Knowing God and having a relationship with him is foreign to African people and therefore African ontology and spirituality is firmly anthropocentric (Mbiti, 1990:48; Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005:219). Human beings are perceived as good; Africans therefore have an optimistic view of human nature (Crafford, 1996:11). Sometimes human beings are even referred to as being divine (Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005:219). God is basically seen to exist to help mankind and to provide for them. He is never seen as an end in Himself. Within this context it is essential to look at the concept of the community, which in the South African concept can be conceptualised as Ubuntu. In other parts of Africa this apparently universal principle is sometimes expressed as communalism (Kaphagawani, 2004:340). Ubuntu can be understood through the following expression in Xhosa “Umntu ngumntu ngabany’ abantu” (a person is a person through other persons). In other words the welfare of the group is considered to be more important than the welfare of the individual. Ubuntu is thus the basis for social order. Harmony in the group is of utmost importance, and disrupting this harmony is ‘sin’ (Crafford, 1996:11; Higgs & Smith, 2003:58; More, 2004:157; Krüger *et al.*, 2004:35ff; Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005:219ff; Friedenthal & Kavanaugh, 2007:19). This is also encapsulated by the fact that young black people are supposed to learn from elders, to accept the way of life handed down by tradition, and in finding their place within the community which is part of nature, they become human beings (Sanon, 1985:68f). Morality as handed down by previous generations, is often perceived to be an integral part of religion in African religions (Oladipo, 2004:361). The community derives its meaning from the past.

God may, however, be worshiped in various ways. As was mentioned already, worship of God or in a broader sense religion is interwoven with daily life (Mbiti, 1990). Often offerings and sacrifices are the attempt to influence God towards giving something specific. Prayers are the most common method of ap-

proaching God (Mbiti, 1996:60ff; Friedenthal & Cavanaugh, 2007:27). The spiritual realm is part of the world and is necessary for reaching God. Spirits are believed to abound in the world. There are nature spirits and human spirits with further distinctions (Mbiti, 1996:70ff; Krüger *et al.*, 2004:34). According to Mbiti (1996:81) the existence of these spirits helps people explain many mysteries which are found in existence. There are also various “specialists” such as medicine men or for examples rainmakers who are supposed to act on behalf of people and to help people by doing some kind of magic and thus interacting with the spirit world (Mbiti, 1990; Crafford, 1996:5ff; Tennent, 2007:123).

The ancestors play a very important role in the life of Africans. If people die they are regarded as living dead. Their process of dying is not yet complete and they are seen as occupying the ontological position between the spirits and men, and are also seen as intermediaries between God and men (Mbiti, 1990:69; Crafford, 1996:14; Menkiti, 2004:327; Tennent, 2007:123). Many happenings and rituals in life such as initiation rites, rituals and practices around marriage, birth and death have very specific symbolic and spiritual significance, due to the involvement of the ancestors.

The concept of the ancestors leads to the necessity of looking at the African time concept. Time in the first place is not something which passes or must be used. Time is simply a composition of events, wasting of time is not possible just as much as being late is a foreign concept (Mbiti, 1990:16; Crafford, 1996:12). Out of this it follows that time is a two-dimensional construct, with a long past, a present and no future. People basically do not look forward but rather backward. To say “I am looking forward to my own past”, would make sense for many Africans (Menkiti, 2004:325). The future is not important and can even be said not to make sense as it has not yet taken place. The idea of the end of the world, heaven or a messianic hope does not exist (Mbiti, 1990:23). Therefore God is mainly seen in terms of this (daily) life and He is supposed to provide for people on a daily basis (Nyamiti, s.a.:11).

The fact that African religion has no writings and no founder, and is in other words not a historical religion, exempts it to a great extent from the possibility of verifying truth claims. The validity of African religion cannot be rationally or logically assured and the only possibility of verification is from experience or from pragmatic

consideration. For most African traditional religionists, such experiences are the sole justification for the truth of their religion together with the sanction of cultural tradition.

The spirituality of African religion can be described as both extrinsic (focusing on external or outward actions, such as rituals), and intrinsic (with a focus on internal experiences of the mind) where people for example can be seen as mediums and communicators between the living and the living dead.

2.5 And the truth shall set you free – Christianity

Christianity, a monotheistic religion, arose as the historical fulfilment and continuation of Judaism. The fulfilment of the Messianic promise as given in the Old Testament stands at the heart of Christianity (Joubert, 1996:143).

Christianity had its origin in Jesus Christ who claimed to be God's Son. His purpose was to save all people who received God's grace i.e. free gift of salvation. This includes the gift of forgiveness, the gift of new life and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The necessity for salvation arose as people had fallen into sin, and were from the fall onwards born in sin (Joubert, 1996:143; Ankerberg & Weldon, 2005:13; Howard, 2008:154ff). The idea of sin centres on the nature of God, and implies that within Christianity absolute standards of good and evil exist (Miller, 2005:17). Sin estranged man from God and placed him under God's wrath. Salvation from this wrath then entailed that Jesus chose to die on a cross in the place of sinners. By this act he reconciled mankind (those who accept the offering) to God Himself, so that people could once again live in the relationship they were meant to have with God (Ankerberg & Weldon, 2005:13f). This also entails the hope that all believers will live forever (have eternal life) in God's presence i.e. heaven (Howard, 2008:236ff). Salvation as a Biblical concept is clearly historical and particularistic (Moreland & Craig, 2003:615).

The main characteristic of the Christian religion and Jesus' teaching is that of God's love (Howard, 2008:29). 'God is love' is a characteristic Christian claim. Because God loved the sinner He sent His Son. Love therefore was His chief motivation. Christians then should be characterised by displaying this same quality. This, however, does not mean that sin, another chief concept, would be

ignored. God is also absolutely good and holy. Sin was the reason God had to come to the earth to die. Christians should therefore love God and their fellow man (Worthington & Berry, 2005:154). Authentic existence is a life of faith, that is, trusting in the faithfulness (absolute reliability and truth) of God. Through such a life of faith they can experience the fullness of God's original creative purpose for mankind, righteousness, joy and peace, centred in a personal relationship with God through Jesus the Christ. Christianity can therefore be classified as a mainly intrinsic religion, focused on the development of a love relationship with Jesus Christ, which should then overflow towards an unselfish love for other people (Joubert, 1996:144; Worthington & Berry, 2005:154; Miller, 2005:232). Certain rituals are involved in the Christian religion, but never as a prerequisite for the free gift of salvation.

After Christ's death, resurrection and ascension the Christian message spread very quickly within the Roman Empire, initially especially through the Apostle Paul (Krüger *et al.*, 2004:184f; Joubert, 1996:132f). In 367 A.D. the canon (the text of the New Testament) was finalised, which consisted of 27 books containing letters, Gospels, history and revelation (Joubert, 1996:136). The Bible is central to Christianity as it embodies God's special revelation for mankind. The historical veracity of the Biblical accounts has been verified by historical research. Both Judaism and Christianity are religions with a strong historical foundation. Some authors state that Christianity can rightly be called the religion with the strongest historical basis (McDowell, 1999:33ff; Geisler, 1999:91ff; Habermas, 2006:161ff).

The Christian Church grew, went through many changes, and many different denominations have been founded. The most significant difference exists between Roman Catholic and Protestant movements. Martin Luther was one of the theologians who wanted to reform the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century. Luther criticised what he felt were unbiblical elements in the doctrine of the day, particularly the teaching that good works are a prerequisite for salvation. He also criticised the unbridled power of the Pope (Joubert, 1996:139; Krüger *et al.*, 2004:202;). Eventually this movement led to the founding of Protestant churches. After this the Catholic Church also went through internal reformations (Krüger *et al.*, 2004:207ff). Other historical branches of the Christian Church

are the offshoot of the reformist and revivalist movements of the 1700's and 1800's which lead to for example Methodism, Congregationalism and Presbyterianism and the late 1900's with the emergence of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. A common feature of these historical movements is a self-conscious attempt to re-establish a form of Christianity more true to the original pattern as found in the New Testament.

When looking at a Christian spirituality the following can be observed. The basis for a Christian spirituality is the recognition that there is a supernatural or spiritual dimension to reality, which is grounded and framed in the Biblical accounts of Creation and the Fall. In summary, the Biblical text claims that humankind was uniquely created for fellowship with God, but the disobedience of the first man Adam destroyed this possibility. The obedience of the second Adam, Jesus, the Anointed One, restored this possibility. Direct personal knowledge of and communion with God is thus central to Christianity (Miller, 2005:16; Howard, 2008:30). Biblically, the possible relationship of love between God and human beings has a central place (Howard, 2008:15, 29). Union with God the Son is essential for receiving the new life. Communication with God the Father through prayer is necessary for growth in the new life. The Christian life is to be one of obedience to and being led by God the Holy Spirit in all aspects (Howard, 2008:299ff). One of the most defining characteristics of Christian spirituality is that of love for God, which emphasises the intrinsic nature of the Christian religion.

In the following section, contemporary conceptions of spirituality will be investigated. The discussion will also focus on the claims made by authors advocating contemporary views about spirituality. As will be shown these are very different from the earlier Western understanding of the concept spirituality, in that it differs very much from its historical roots in the Christian tradition.

3. Contemporary conceptions of spirituality

Some authors describe spirituality as being an 'elusive' concept, which is very difficult to define (Smith & Shortt, 2000:3; Eaude, 2001:224,229; Scott, 2005:118; Cottingham, 2005:46; Heelas, 2012:5), especially when considered in a secular and pluralistic context (Duff, 2003:227). This is especially the case when this new spirituality is understood as a reaction against modern rationalism

(Wright, 2000:2). Alexander and Carr (2006:74) posit that the reason why spirituality is difficult to define is because there is a fundamental ontological uncertainty concerning the nature, objects and referents of spiritual discourse. This results in deep ambiguities. This discourse is an attempt to identify and address the “fundamental ontological” issues and to resolve this ambiguity, or at least to move the debate forward towards some clarity. Even though in general there is no consensus concerning the term *spirituality*, and there is no accepted definition of the concept (Zinnbauer, Pargament & Scott, 1999:891ff; McSherry & Cash, 2004:154; Bursztein, 2004:65; Hodder, 2007:186), most contemporary authors include all or some of the following aspects in their definitions. The life of a spiritual person should be characterised by the following (Seaward, 1995:166; Hawks, Hull, Thalman & Richins, 1995:372; Westgate, 1996:27; Myers, Sweeney & Witmer, 2000:265; Wright, 2000:12; Champagne, 2001:83f; Eaude, 2001:231; Jankowski, 2002:69f; Watson, 2006:253):

- Meaning and purpose
- Moral and ethical values and beliefs
- Relationships or connectedness
- Transcendence

These four dimensions represent a tenuous consensus in the conception of spirituality. This definition is not based on the historical antecedents alluded to above. Most authors, however, still see spirituality as having a ‘supernatural’ element (Richards & Bergin, 1998; Vaughan, 1991:105). Gur-Ze’ev (2004:223) sees spirituality simply as the presence of spirit in the human soul and body.

Many of the spiritualities discussed below are privatised, meaning that while spirituality in the past was seen as being part of organised religion, this has now changed into mostly private experiences, outside of any religious or secular institution (Wright, 2000:55).

It is impossible to describe in detail all the different types and viewpoints concerning spirituality in this article. Certain broader trends will be described under selected headings. The different trends are often not mutually exclusive. They overlap and interrelate with each other. The following should therefore not be seen as a definitive classification.

3.1 Post-modern trends

The new concept of spirituality is deeply informed by post-modernism, and to an extent was born out of post-modernism (Semetsky, 2004:55ff). Much of today's spirituality has become reified as a commodity (Gur-Ze'ev, 2004:229). One of the basic tenets of post-modernism is its denial of absolute truth (Lyotard, 1979; Foucault, 1984; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1986). This manifests itself clearly within the areas of spirituality. It is axiomatic that there is no definition and that spirituality can mean different things all at once (King, 1996:343; Chater, 2001:64). Zinnbauer *et al.* (1999) for example name the following spiritualities: Eastern spiritualities, Native-American spiritualities, goddess spiritualities, earth-based or ecological spiritualities and so forth. Maher & Hunt (1993:21) say that it is finally in the eye of the beholder whether or not a spirituality will be accessible. The fact that Native American powwows are now routinely practised in Great Britain is an example of this (Welch, 2005:47). McSherry and Cash (2004:154ff) describe spirituality as a "cocktail" of different strengths and flavours. They posit a taxonomy of spirituality which is on the one hand theistic (belief in a supreme being) and religious (belief in God, observance of rituals) moving towards phenomenological spirituality (learning about life through living and experience) towards mystical spirituality (relationship between the transcendent, interpersonal and transpersonal). A whole spectrum of spiritualities is acceptable according to these authors. McSherry and Cash (2004:157) conclude that there are two broad types of spirituality, an older type which is based on religious and theocentric descriptors, and a newer, post-modern form which is subjective and comprises an eclectic variety of descriptors. Estanek (2006:276) on the other hand perceives the two 'strains' of spirituality. The first strain includes a higher being, the second one only sees spirituality as a common human capacity. Some authors have a more instrumental view where religion is seen as helpful but not mandatory (Radford, 2006:386).

Within post-modernism there is a great diversity of equally valid spiritualities, which are not seen as mutually exclusive (Wright, 2000:49; Nesbitt, 2001:131ff). One of the characteristics of these new spiritualities is the fact that they tend to be egalitarian, loathing any kind of particularity, hierarchy and authority (Woodhead, 1993:174; Chater, 2001:64). At the same time, these spiritualities

tend to have a deep distrust of rationality as well as 'fundamentalism'. We should be free to choose our own spirituality. This is relativism (Woodhead, 1993:175; Chater, 2001:64).

Yob (1995:106) for example uses the concept of truth as being absolute when speaking about facts, while at the same time she advocates a multi-religious spirituality, which is a contradiction within a rational approach. In general it is acceptable to locate spirituality within a specific religious context, as long as this is not absolutised. Any religion can serve as a context for spirituality (Alexander, 2004:x). Truth within the *new* spiritualities is relativistic. As postulated by Webster (2004:10) it is *not* seen as fact but as taking hidden things out of their concealment.

3.2 Feminist trends

Feminism is a growing movement (Holt, 2005:170), and within the spirituality movement there is a growing faction of feminist perspectives, which originated in the 1980s (Woodhead, 1993:167; Waaijman, 2002:218). These feminist spiritualities come in diverse forms, some of them attempt to remain within a Christian context, such as Joan Chittister, or Rosemary Radford Ruether. In general Christian feminists tend to be of a liberal persuasion and are often associated with forms of liberation theology (Holt, 2005:167ff). Feminist spiritualities are rooted in women's experience, emphasise 'freedom of conscience' or the idea of internal voices as well as egalitarian social relationships (Wuthnow, 1998:65; Waaijman, 2002:219).

The influence is evident in two ways. Many spiritualities nowadays are post-Christian, and this also informs feminism. Mary Daly and Daphne Hampson are two of the most notable post-Christian feminists, who sharply criticise Christianity mainly for its assumed patriarchy and oppression (Woodhead, 1993:167f). They suggest a feminist spirituality which focuses on connectedness and mythologies. This means that many pre-Christian and non-Christian religions are intermixed with Christian (Biblical) spirituality. Secondly these feminist spiritualities base a significant amount of their argument on their idea that the Bible devalues women. However, here it has to be remembered that the status of the women in ancient Israel, Greek and Rome was very low (Bell, 1998:196ff). The Bible actually places a much higher value on women than any

other culture of the day (Bohlin, 2005). Feminist spiritualities also often include gay and lesbian spiritualities, which are often conceived of as a struggle to be free (Chater, 2000:198).

Christianity is completely discredited in the opinion of many feminist authors (Woodhead, 1993:170). These spiritualities differ from the Christian tradition in mainly three areas. It rejects that God was incarnated in Jesus, and that the Bible does convey absolute truth. This is substituted for by experience. Secondly, it rejects the Christian belief in God as being omnipotent and omniscient and disbelieves the manifestation of God in Christ Jesus. Thirdly it also rejects the idea of human sinfulness and prefers a much more positive view of human nature (Woodhead, 1993:173).

Some points need to be mentioned here in criticism. Even though these movements tend to emphasise tolerance and universality, they nevertheless have a distinct element of fundamentalism in them as they absolutise certain values or basic tenets of their belief system, such as their specific view of women. However, fundamentalism is something which they strongly reject. Despite their view on truth, they tend to consider themselves to be right and no other (Woodhead, 1993:175).

To conclude, these feminist spiritualities are post-modernistic in their approach and many of them depart from and even oppose the historical Christian roots of spirituality.

3.3 Multi-religious and atheist trends

It is consistent within the canons of post-modernism to recognise all religions and spiritualities as being true or equally valid (Veith, 1994; Wright, 2000:49).

As has been mentioned, spirituality has to a large extent been divorced from institutionalised religion (Zinnbauer *et al.*, 1999:899). However, the new trend is to include any religious element into personal spirituality. Often there is also the conscious mixing of two religious traditions such as Christianity and for example Zen-Buddhism (Yob, 1995:110). Some (Maher & Hunt, 1993:23) go further by saying that the roots of spirituality are nowhere more clearly apparent than in the mainstream traditions of the Native Americans, who exude a spirit of universal respect for all living things. The authors consider this the same rich spiritual soil that

was present among the pre-industrial European-Americans (Maher & Hunt, 1993:23). Interestingly it is even claimed that atheists and agnostics have spiritual needs, which can among others be seen as being needs for meaning (Burnard, 1988:130; Wright, 2000:79).

Within the post-modern context therefore any conception of God or spirituality is legitimate, as is the atheistic conception, or a general secular conception, while the Christian particularistic version is largely rejected (Woodhead, 1993:173; Tacey, 2001:90ff; Gearon, 2004:189). It is remarkable that in many cases spirituality has been completely divorced from its social origins and often there is no grounding in history. Even though the roots of spirituality as known in the West lie firmly embedded within the Judeo-Christian historical tradition, these roots are often rejected as being outdated or are ignored. There is also the claim that there are roots of Western spiritualities outside of the Christian tradition (Tacey, 2001:90ff; Ayman, 2004:107).

The movement which combines Eastern religions with Christianity or introduces Eastern practices and conceptions into Western concepts of spiritualities, will be discussed under the following heading, as it is a large movement on its own.

3.4 Eastern trends

As has been mentioned above a significant number of contemporary conceptions of spirituality include practices or references to the Eastern religions.

In the past 60 years the West was very much influenced by Eastern traditions and views of spirituality (Rodger, 1996:46; Warrier, 2012:299). Already during the Romantic movement Westerners became interested in Eastern religions and spiritualities (Ellwood, 1987:11). This became more pronounced after the Second World War. Eastern religions eventually infiltrated Western society in various ways, so that there are now many established Eastern religions, some of which have become institutionalised (Chater, 2005:230). There are also other more subtle ways of influence such as for example theosophical and yoga groups (Ellwood, 1987). In the post war period in the West, many young people turned to these kinds of spiritualities (Tacey, 2001:89f).

More recently, there have been attempts to unite Eastern and Western spiritualities, as they are claimed to be “one world with two pers-

pectives” (Yob, 1995:109). All religions are viewed as equal. However, to maintain this view, these authors draw heavily on Eastern religious concepts. The Chinese concept of yin and yang can be mentioned in this context. It claims that there is only one whole, with different parts, namely yin (femininity, responsiveness, cooperation) and yang (masculinity, demands, aggression, rationality). There is always, it is claimed, a move towards one and away from the other (Capra, 1984). Yob (1995:110ff) also confirms this, saying that spiritualities should be seen as being complementary. In contrast to this, Hanna and Green (2004) perceive Eastern spiritualities as being uniquely part of Eastern religions. In their article they describe the different Eastern religions (Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam), perceiving them as a different kind of spirituality than traditionally found in the West.

It has been shown that many spiritualities include various Eastern religions, however, in most cases there is ample room for the mixing of religious traditions and practices.

Even though more trends could be mentioned concerning contemporary notions of spirituality, this will not be attempted here. The permutations and combinations are complex and diverse and a full discussion will require too much detail.

4. A framework for evaluating different kinds of spiritualities

In order to be able to evaluate spiritualities constructively a framework was developed. It is essential to look at the differences between various perceptions of spiritualities as this can open up dialogue. When no differences are recognised dialogue collapses at the outset.

We can summarise by saying that with regard to spirituality, there are few authors who would dispute *that* it is, but when we raise the question as to *what* it is, we find an irreducibly complex web of viewpoints and opinions, as has been shown above. Communities and cultures have different categories or descriptors for explaining what spirituality is. There is a multiplicity of ‘voices’ or ‘discourses’. The spirit of our post-modern times dictates that we affirm them all and celebrate diversity. This implies opting for inclusiveness over against particularity or uniqueness. The above discussion, however,

alerts us to the unsustainability of this position logically and existentially. We are confronted with the problem of truth, a problem that seemingly will not go away. It is a problem because even those who would deny truth assume some sort of logical substructure to reality and existence, without which the denial of truth would be shouting in a vacuum. We are then left with the question, "How do we make sense of this multiplicity of discourse?" The above discussion seems to point to three sources of truth – logic, history and experience. When evaluating any claims as to what spirituality is, we must use these three criteria. Is it logical? Is it historical? Is it true to experience? In this sense spirituality must defer to epistemology.

When describing spiritualities or the expression of spirituality in this study these three criteria can be reformulated into three constructs or continua. First, there was the very distinct difference between spiritualities based on verifiable historical events versus spiritualities that have been divorced from any historical background. McSherry and Cash (2004:154ff) describe spirituality as a "cocktail" of different strengths and flavours. They posit a taxonomy of spirituality which is on the one hand theistic (belief in a supreme being) and religious (belief in God, observance of rituals) moving towards phenomenological spirituality (learning about life through living and experience) towards mystical spirituality (relationship between the transcendent, interpersonal and transpersonal), as was described above. A whole spectrum of spiritualities is acceptable according to these authors. Two axes are discernable here. Theistic versus atheistic and external observance versus internal experience. As was mentioned earlier, McSherry and Cash (2004:157) describe this first continuum as based on religious and theocentric descriptors versus an eclectic variety of descriptors. This continuum would be historical versus ahistorical.

Secondly, as was mentioned throughout the discussion most religions can be characterised as inclusive, allowing various and often disparate elements, sometimes including diverse deities, all as part of an ideal type of spirituality. 'Tolerance' in these views is one of the defining moral qualities. Historical approaches on the other hand describe spirituality in one specific way, based on a particular view of God, a specific view of reality and an absolute view of truth.

Thirdly there is the continuum of extrinsic versus intrinsic spiritualities. Extrinsic spiritualities would focus on outward, communal acts or observances, as practiced in various religious communities. Intrinsic spiritualities focus on the psychological aspects of individual human beings, and characteristically these types of spiritualities are motivated intrinsically.

The following table can be used to categorise the spiritualities discussed into the three continua (intrinsic versus extrinsic, particular versus inclusive, historical versus ahistorical). It has, however, to be noted that these categorisations are to be seen as some of the more salient poles within a multidimensional continuum, not as mutually exclusive criteria. They also attempt to categorise spiritualities and not religious traditions, although some degree of identification between the two is unavoidable. This means that even though Hinduism can for example be classified as extrinsic, it nevertheless has intrinsic elements.

Table: Possible categorisation of expressions of spiritualities

	Historical		A-historical	
	Particular	Inclusive	Particular	Inclusive
Intrinsic				
Extrinsic				

5. Evaluation of different expressions of spirituality

The basic question in this section is the following: Given the fact that spirituality is a universal human phenomenon, is it now epistemologically justifiable to choose any spirituality from the vast array of possible spiritualities according to personal or cultural taste? In the following the various trends and types of spiritualities will be examined.

The contemporary spiritualities will be considered first. They will be discussed in the order as they have been mentioned earlier on. All of those, as will become plainly visible, are very much related in essence, as they share similar philosophical underpinnings.

5.1 *Post-modern trends*

Much has already been said about post-modern spiritualities, and it has become clear that the main characteristic is probably

inclusiveness. This inclusiveness is not based on any historical basis but rather developed out of the post-modern mindset, devaluing any absolute truth value (cf. Semetsky, 2004:55ff). Post-modern spiritualities can therefore be both intrinsic or extrinsic, even though most would probably be intrinsic, meaning that they would focus on individual experience. However, the most important point is that such spiritualities have no (historical) basis except the contemporary notion that spirituality needs to be liberated from the bonds of logical positivism and particularity and that it should therefore be open to any interpretation. The lack of historical grounding and a coherent epistemology justifying this belief is lacking and reveals clearly that this perception of spirituality contains many possibly insurmountable philosophical problems.

5.2 *Feminist trends*

Even though feminist spiritualities or trends are often grounded in post-modernism, there are distinct differences. Firstly feminist spiritualities often developed out of a reaction against Christianity with its perceived focus on the dominance of men, therefore in many cases deliberately ignoring historical context, or re-interpreting it in order to correspond to the idea of feminism. In addition to that, it seems that feminist spirituality is at least partly inclusive, encompassing gay and lesbian spiritualities. However, it would strongly reject spiritualities that would for example be perceived as patriarchal, which renders it partly particularistic. Regarding intrinsic or extrinsic elements of spirituality, it can be postulated that both are present as there is a high emphasis on experience. Some branches of feminism focus on the reinstatement of old mythologies which predated Christianity in the West and for this reason are considered more authentic.

It can therefore be said that feminist spiritualities seem to have little more epistemological credentials than post-modern trends. There is no proper historical basis. Particularism in feminist spiritualities is based on a preferred collection of acceptable values and is not grounded in a desire to be truthful to external realities. It is based on certain presuppositions.

5.3 *Multi-religious and atheist trends*

Multi-religious and atheist trends of spirituality are embedded in post-modernism. Here it becomes evident again that a historical

basis is rejected in favour of the idea that any religion or atheist perception and promotion of spirituality is legitimate and desirable (cf. Tacey, 2001:90ff; Gearon, 2004:189). Often pre-Christian religions, which lack a historical and evidential basis are seen as superior and as being able to provide a framework for the spiritual. As is the case with post-modern trends, multi-religious and atheist spiritualities are focused on experience and are by definition inclusive, although only as long as no included belief-system makes claims to particularity.

5.4 Eastern trends

Eastern trends of spirituality focus on the inclusion of elements from Eastern religions (mainly Buddhism and Hinduism) into Western concepts of spirituality. Again this is grounded in a post-modern understanding of the world, where the inclusion of different ideas of spirituality is desirable. Eastern notions of spirituality are thought to enhance Western ideas of spirituality, not on the basis of history, but rather on the basis of anticipated intrinsic experiences (cf. Yob, 1995:109). This also lacks a proper epistemological basis.

5.5 Problems with contemporary trends of spirituality

It becomes evident that contemporary trends of spirituality, which are all to an extent grounded in post-modernism, reveal philosophical challenges when it comes to epistemological foundations. None of them can present any clear reason based on history or historical evidence why this specific trend or concept of spirituality should be advocated. All of them are based on popular notions of the relative nature of truth which is highly problematic philosophically. The tension between particularity and inclusiveness arises.

In the following paragraphs the different religions will be investigated in the same way as these contemporary trends in spiritualities have been considered. Whereas many of these trends in contemporary views of spirituality seem very arbitrary, there is at least in some cases more of an epistemological basis on which the following spiritualities are based on.

5.6 Hindu spirituality

One of the most defining characteristics of Hinduism is its inclusiveness. As was explained earlier, Hinduism accepts many

gods and there is no claim to exclusiveness. There is no discernable historical basis for Hindu spirituality. The different recognised texts or scriptures of Hinduism are said to have existed always and it is difficult to find any verifiable historical events in them. Furthermore there are various rituals to be observed, pointing to a partly extrinsic type of spirituality, which, however, does not deny the intrinsic elements in Hindu spirituality.

5.7 Buddhist spirituality

Even though Buddhism has a definite, even if historically shadowy, founder there is little historical evidence available within the Buddhist texts to verify any truth claims made. Historical events, other than the life of Buddha, are generally not very important within the faith. Buddhist spirituality very much focuses on intrinsic experience (cf. Krüger *et al.*, 2004:125) and tends to be generally inclusive. Zen-Buddhism, which is the form of Buddhism that has mostly influenced the West, is self-consciously illogical, denying any absolutes and opposites, as everything is considered to be one.

5.8 Islam spirituality

Compared to other spiritualities Islamic spirituality probably has the strongest focus on extrinsic observance of rituals, therefore having few intrinsic elements. It is grounded historically, more so than the other spiritualities discussed up to this point. The life of Muhammad is well-documented. Also in contrast to the other spiritualities Islamic spirituality is strongly particularistic, and would claim that there is only one right and true way to worship, to such an extent that holy war is advocated against “unbelievers”.

5.9 African traditional spirituality

Spirituality in African traditional religions focuses mainly on placating the deceased ancestors. This involves many rituals. Experience can be classified as mainly extrinsic. Looking at a historical record there is virtually no written record except the scant testimonies of the colonial period. Even though there are oral traditions it still means that we can probably conclude that African traditional religion is not sufficiently historically grounded. Although somewhat syncretistic, African traditional spirituality can be described as particularistic.

5.10 Christian spirituality

When considering Christian spirituality it becomes clear that there is a very definite historical basis available (cf, Geisler, 1999:91ff; Habermas, 2006:161ff). The Biblical texts are self-consciously grounded in history and therefore can be tested against historical evidence. The practice of Christian spirituality focuses on intrinsic experience, a relationship with God. However, this relationship is possible only through the historical life, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. These are important extrinsic elements. However, biblical Christianity always warns against an empty externalism. "True worshippers" must worship "in spirit and in truth". Like Islam, Christianity is particularistic, calling for the 'repentance' of all, and that at the end of the age, "every tongue will confess" that Jesus the Christ is the one true God.

5.11 Problems with religion-based spiritualities

When considering the different religious traditions which inform the expressions of spirituality it becomes clear that in most religions providing a sound epistemological basis receives little attention. If an epistemological foundation is not given then it is difficult to justify or even validate a spirituality. A spirituality which is not built on historically verifiable facts is automatically problematic.

However, it seems that the biggest problem when considering different religions as well as contemporary concepts of spirituality is the tension between particularity and inclusiveness, which will therefore be discussed in the following section.

6. Discussion

The question is: Can and should one type of spirituality be promoted as the correct or right one to the exclusion of others, or should a general spirituality be advocated? It seems, however, that arguing for particularity in this post-modern climate would be condemned from the outset, as it would imply that certain religions/spiritualities are considered better than others, a position popularly portrayed as 'intolerance'. Ironically, such 'intolerance' is not tolerated within the canons of the post-modern world-view.

If one spirituality or religion is seen to be true it means that particularity is the only option. However, if all religions are seen to be

equally true then truth is usually seen as relative and not absolute and inclusiveness has to be the defining paradigm.

It has to be highlighted that the whole inclusiveness idea was inspired by post-modernism with its denial of absolute truth. The statement that there is no absolute truth is logically self-defeating, as an absolute statement is made, rejecting any statement with truth-value. This is a basic flaw in the whole theory of post-modernism, and to date it has not been resolved. It also means that from a post-modern view post-modernism can only be seen as another “arbitrary social construction”, as the only arbiter for truth is the sole perspective of an autonomous vacillating individual (Tenent, 2002:242). If post-modernism could be shown to be true, it would destroy its own main thesis (McCallum, 1996:53). Also it seems that post-modernism is accepted and hailed as the way to a better society simply on a presuppositionalist basis. This means that post-modernism is accepted as a presupposition or prerequisite. This presupposition is not deemed to be open to criticism, simply because it is unquestioningly accepted as a given. According to the proponents of post-modernism it is ‘taboo’ to ask for an evidential basis for the uncritical acceptance of post-modern claims.

The idea of truth remains central in the debate. It does not appear philosophically or academically possible to dispose of the question of truth, as it seems to be inherent in the nature of things. It is not possible to deny that most things are either/or. This is patently true for the physical world (either a mushroom is poisonous or it is not). However, as has been argued above, there are sound reasons to maintain that it also holds for moral statements. It cannot be wrong and not wrong at the same time to steal a car. To claim that there is no absolute truth is logically untenable and simply at odds with daily experience. Some argue that while this might be true for the physical world, social realities are far more complex and cannot be reduced to simple truth-statements. While acknowledging that social realities are complex, it does not warrant the dismissal of any attempts to establish truth. It is precisely because social issues *are* grounded in historical contexts and communities of practice and beliefs that the question cannot be avoided. Of course, it is true that there are for example different cultures which have different practices, and sometimes none of these practices seems to be

more right than another. For example there is no right way of greeting. Shaking hands or kissing when greeting someone is neither inherently right nor wrong. However, few people would disagree that female circumcision or rape are great evils. Nonetheless, according to the idea that there is no absolute truth, and therefore no absolute right or wrong, this statement cannot be made.

It is claimed that a set of values should be chosen which suits all people, cultures and religions. However, what is to be done if there is a group of people who believe in the need to practice female circumcision? Or what is to be done with people who stubbornly advocate that only their brand of spirituality or philosophical claim is right, in other words who do not have a high value for tolerance at all? If no truth statement is made then circumcising females is both right and wrong which is a contradiction. If a truth statement is made a group of people is discriminated against, which is inherently wrong in the canons of inclusiveness. Here something needs to be added concerning the value of tolerance. The whole idea of inclusiveness can only work if all people subscribe to the idea that tolerance is the highest value in a given society. The logical consequence would then be that people who do not see tolerance as the highest value will become the objects of social pressure to conform to the “majority view” or be discriminated against. Within the idea and philosophy of inclusiveness there is, however, no basis for the claim that tolerance is or must be the highest value. It can thus be considered as being arbitrarily chosen and could, according to the idea that no absolute truth exists, be replaced by any other value. In short, for tolerance to be accepted as an ideal value, a coherent justification is needed to explain why it is ideal (cf. Sokal & Bricmont, 1998:50ff; Geisler, 1999:501f).

Furthermore it must be noted that most religions make absolute truth claims (even though this does not warrant an uncritical acceptance of these truth claims as actually being true). Adherents of these religions do not agree with the idea that all religions are ultimately the same. Religions make particular truth claims which often contradict each other and are as a result mutually exclusive. Few Muslims would agree with inclusiveness, neither would most Christians. Many Hindus would probably agree with the *idea* of inclusiveness to an extent, as long as they can keep all their gods

in place in practice – in other words as long as no one compromises their position that there *are* millions of gods and not only one.

This discussion has shown that the idea of inclusiveness holds many problems and that therefore many types of spirituality should be questioned concerning their validity.

7. Conclusion

In this article it has been shown that there is a vast array of different spiritualities, many arising out of our post-modern climate. Many of these pose different problems as has been shown. Even though spirituality seems to be understood by all as it is one of the new buzzwords in society, there is no consensus on definition and no proper grounding in origin and theory. When scrutinised, many contemporary notions of spirituality fall short of credibility, as has been shown. In further academic discourse a more critical stance towards many of these spiritualities should therefore be adopted, and notions and statements made so easily concerning spirituality should be questioned. It also seems that a Christian spirituality has a lot more credibility than believed and perceived in current academia.

The author is aware of the fact that this is just in introductory discussion and that much more research can be done especially focusing on specific types of spiritualities.

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